

California Arts Council

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PETE WILSON GOVERNOR

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News Release

California Arts Council Grantee Ali Akbar Khan to be honored at White House ceremony as a 1997 National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellow

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Washington, D.C. -- The California Arts Council is proud to announce that Ali Akbar Khan, one of the world's most accomplished Indian Classical musicians, will be among 11 master musicians and artisans named 1997 National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellows who will be honored in a White House ceremony at 2 p.m. on Tuesday, September 23, 1997. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton will be joined by Jane Alexander, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, in saluting the Fellows' achievements as artists, teachers, innovators, and guardians of generations-old art forms. The National Heritage Fellowships are the Arts Endowment's most prestigious honor in folk and traditional arts.

Two days after the White House ceremony, on Thursday, September 25, 1997, at 7:30 p.m., the Heritage Fellows will perform music or demonstrate their art work at a free public concert and celebration at George Washington University's Lisner Auditorium, at 730 21st St., N.W. in Washington, D.C. Admission is free-of-charge, but tickets are required. Call the National Council for the Traditional Arts at 301-565-0654 for tickets and additional concert information.

Since 1982, the Arts Endowment has awarded over 200 National Heritage Fellowships. Every year, hundreds of nominations are reviewed by panelists who consider criteria including authenticity, excellence, and significance within a particular artistic tradition. Often, Fellows selected have contributed to the revitalization of their chosen art form. Each Fellowship includes a onetime award of \$10,000. Target stores has helped fund the 1997 National Heritage Fellowship events.

Barbara Pieper, Director of the California Arts Council, states, "California has an extremely rich mix in the arts. This year our State is honored to have three National Heritage Fellows named."

Ali Akbar Khan is a performing artist in the California Arts Council's Performing Arts Touring and Presenting Program's *Touring Artists Directory*, and has been on the Touring Artists roster since the 1987-88 season. (This year's *Touring Artists Directory* can be found on the California Arts Council's web site.)

Considered a "National Living Treasure" in India, **Ali Akbar Khan** is admired by both Eastern and Western musicians for his brilliant compositions and his mastery of the *sarod* (a beautiful 25-stringed Indian instrument). Ali Akbar Khan's family traces its *gharana* (ancestral tradition) to Mian Tansen, a 16th century musical genius and court musician of Emperor Akbar. Ali Akbar Khan's father, the late Padma Vibhushan Acharya Dr. Allauddin Khan, was acknowledged as the greatest figure in North Indian music in this century.

Akbar Khan was born in Bangladesh in 1922, and from age three studied music with his father whose other students included celebrated sitarist Ravi Shankar. For 20 years, his father spent 15 hours a day teaching him. First learning vocal music, then drums, he usually practiced 18 hours a day. If practice makes perfect, Akbar Khan's accomplishments are testimony. Still in his early 20s, he became the court musician for the Maharaja of Jodhpur. He has since travelled the globe, touring extensively in Asia, Africa, Europe, Australia, and North America. In 1955, he made his first American recording of

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HTTP://WWW.CAC.CA.GOV EMAIL: CAC@CWO.COM Indian music and gave the first television performance of Indian music on Alistair Cooke's "Omnibus" show. Other performing highlights include the East-West Encounter in Tokyo, Carnegie and Town Hall in New York; the Festival of India at Philharmonic Hall; Expo '67 in Montreal; and the Berkeley and Monterey Jazz Festivals. He still embarks on an annual world tour. The Ali Akbar College of Music in San Rafael, California, which he founded in 1967, now has trained 7000 American devotees and opened a branch in Basel, Switzerland.

In 1963, and again in 1966, Ali Akbar Khan was presented with the "President of India" award, the highest honor given to an artist in India. He also holds the distinguished award of the Government of India - the Padma Bhushan," as well as the "Padma Vibhushan," awarded to him in 1988. He was awarded the "Kalidas Sanman" in 1991 by the Madhya Pradesh Academy of Music and Fine Arts, and an honorary Doctorate Degree in Arts from the California Institute of the Arts, in Valencia, California. In June of 1991, Ali Akbar Khan became the first Indian musician to be awarded the most prestigious MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, the "genius grant," in recognition of his excellent work in the field of creating, cultivating and transmitting the highly complex musical tradition of Northern India. In March of 1993, he was presented the Bill Graham Lifetime Achievement Award "Bammies" by the Bay Area Music Awards Foundation as a symbol of respect and appreciation for a career-long body of work that continues to influence and inspire succeeding generations. He has also received the degree of Doctor of Literature, honoree causa, from the Rabindra Bharati University in Calcutta. He received additional awards from Dacca University (for his international contribution to the arts and music), from Delhi University and from Shantiniketan (Tagore University).

The Heritage Fellows hail from eight different states and reflect the richness and diversity of America's many cultures. The 1997 National Heritage Fellowship recipients are: **Edward Babb**, a "Shout" Band Gospel trombonist, Jamaica, New York; **Charles Brown**, a Rhythm & Blues pianist, vocalist and composer, Berkeley, California; **Gladys LeBlanc Clark**, an Acadian[Cajun] spinner and weaver, Duson, Louisiana; **Hua Wenyi**, a Chinese *Kunqu* opera singer, Arcadia, California; **Ramon Jose Lopez**, a *santero* and metalsmith, Santa Fe, New Mexico; **Jim and Jesse McReynolds**, Bluegrass musicians, Gallatin, Tennessee; **Phong Nguyen**, a Vietnamese musician and scholar, Kent, Ohio; **Hystercine Rankin**, an African American quilter, Lorman, Mississippi; **Francis Whitaker**, a blacksmith/ornamental ironworker, Carbondale, Colorado; and **Ali Akbar Khan**, a North Indian *sarod* player and raga composer, San Anselmo, California.

"For us, as a family, music is like food. When you need it you don't have to explain why, because it is basic to life."

-- Ali Akbar Khan

The California Arts Council, a state agency established in 1976, promotes artistic awareness and participation in California. The California Arts Council's mission is to promote the arts and serve the people of California. The Arts Council provides technical assistance and grants to artists and nonprofit organizations. Applications are reviewed and rated at public meetings by outside professional peer panels and receive final approval from the appointed 11-member Council. Arts Council members include: Thomas Hall, Chair; James L. Loper, Vice Chair; Dea Spanos Berberian; Edward C. Cazier, Jr.; Iris R. Dart; Doris Fisher; Barbara George; Hugh Hewitt; Janet Karatz; David C. Lizarraga; and A.C. Lyles.

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